# "Civil War and Intervention: Lessons Remembered From the Lebanese Civil War and the U.S. Response"

A Monograph
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AY 2010

## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

| 1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) | 2. REPORT TYPE | 3. DATES COVERED (From - To) |
|---|---|---|
| 21-05-2010 | SAMS Monograph | July 2009 – May 2010 |

| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER |
|---|---|
| Civil War and Intervention: Lessons Remembered From the Lebanese Civil War and the U.S. Response | |
| | 5b. GRANT NUMBER |
| | 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER |

| 6. AUTHOR(S) | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER |
|---|---|
| Major Michael A. Crawford (U.S. Army) | |
| | 5e. TASK NUMBER |
| | 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER |

| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) | 8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER |
|---|---|
| School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS)<br>250 Gibbon Avenue<br>Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2134 | |

| 9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) |
|---|---|
| Foreign Military Studies Office & Command and General Staff College Director, FMSO<br>731 McClellan Ave.<br>Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-1350 | FMSO / CGSC |
| | 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) |

**12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**
Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited

**13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES**

**14. ABSTRACT**

The 1975 Lebanese Civil War was one of the most disastrous and costly civil wars in modern history. The human toll of the "First Phase" of the war was immense, with estimates of 40,000 dead, 60,000 wounded and 600,000 Lebanese civilians displaced from their homes. When the Lebanese conflagration began, the United States was beset by a number of political and economic challenges. President Gerald R. Ford was an unelected leader with very little political influence and the U.S. military was in disarray following Vietnam. Confronted with a weakening economy, domestic political instability, Cold War political maneuvering and Middle East peace initiatives, President Ford decided against a U.S. military intervention in Lebanon. This inaction and passivity ultimately contributed to an abdication of U.S. regional leadership and international influence during a very tumultuous time. The U.S. leadership opted instead to focus on diplomacy and partnerships with regional actors to influence Lebanese peace negotiations. This strategy led to the empowerment of a authoritarian Syrian regime, which culminated in a massive Syrian invasion of Lebanon under the guise of ending the violence.

**15. SUBJECT TERMS**
Lebanon, Civil War, Intervention, United States Foreign Policy.

| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:<br>(U) | | | 17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT | 18. NUMBER OF PAGES | 19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON<br>Stefan J. Banach<br>COL, U.S. Army |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **a. REPORT** | **b. ABSTRACT** | **c. THIS PAGE** | | | **19b. PHONE NUMBER** (include area code) |
| (U) | (U) | (U) | (U) | 48 | 913-758-3302 |

# SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES

## MONOGRAPH APPROVAL

MAJ Michael Anthony Crawford

Title of Monograph: "Civil War and Intervention: Lessons Remembered From the Lebanese Civil War and the U.S. Response"

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# Abstract

Civil War and Intervention: Lessons Remembered from the Lebanese Civil War and the US Response by MAJ Michael A. Crawford, U.S. Army, 52 pages.

The 1975 Lebanese Civil War was one of the most disastrous and costly civil wars in modern history. The human toll of the "First Phase" of the war was immense, with estimates of 40,000 dead, 60,000 wounded and 600,000 Lebanese civilians displaced from their homes.[1] When the Lebanese conflagration began, the United States was beset by a number of political and economic challenges. President Gerald R. Ford was an unelected leader with little political influence and the U.S. military was in disarray following Vietnam. Confronted with a weakening economy, domestic political instability, Cold War political maneuvering and Middle East peace initiatives, President Ford decided against a U.S. military intervention. Ultimately this inaction contributed to an abdication of U.S. regional leadership and international influence during a tumultuous time.

The U.S. leadership opted instead for diplomacy and partnerships with regional actors to influence the peace negotiations. This strategy led to the empowerment of the authoritarian Syrian regime which culminated with a massive Syrian invasion of Lebanon. This examination of the Lebanese Civil War and the policy decisions made by the U.S. government against military intervention are especially relevant in the modern context. The proliferation of civil wars is a disturbing trend that is likely to continue. Over the last half century alone, the number of civil wars has far exceeded that of the more traditional wars. It is important for military professionals to understand the nature of these conflicts and how decisions for and against a military intervention can have far reaching unintended consequences.[2]

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[1] Petran, Tabitha, *The Struggle Over Lebanon* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987), 227.

[2] Walter, Barbara F, *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), 1.

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# Introduction

The United States' decision against a military intervention in the 1975-1976 Lebanese Civil War was a political miscalculation that ultimately costs thousands of lives and resulted in Syria becoming the dominant political and cultural influence in Lebanon that endures until today. Not only did the Syrian invasion of 1976 have disastrous political implications for the Lebanese people, the violence did not end, reigniting periodically over the following 20 years. The examination of the Lebanese Civil War and the policy decisions made by the highest levels of the U.S. government against a military intervention is especially relevant in the modern context. Over the last half century, the number of civil wars has far exceeded that of the more traditional interstate wars and it is important for military professional to understand that this is a trend that is likely to continue.[3]

Stathis Kalyvas has defined civil war as "armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities."[4] The Lebanese Civil War which began in 1975 and raged in varying levels of intensity until 1990 was one of the most divisive and brutal civil wars fought in the last 50 years and resulted in the deaths of thousands of Lebanese and Palestinian civilians.[5] Civil wars are particularly disastrous for three principal reasons. First civil wars tend to last on average 15 months longer than a traditional war; secondly they defy resolution or settlement by a decisive victory and lastly, most civil wars re-ignite even if the belligerents sign a treaty or settlement.[6]

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[3] Walter, Barbara F, *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), 1.

[4] Kalyvas, Stathis, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Univ. Press, 2006), 2.

[5] Petran, Tabitha, *The Struggle Over Lebanon* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1987), 227. Estimates of dead from 1975-1976 range from 40-50 thousand with displaced civilians ranging to 600,000.

[6] Walter, *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention*, 1.

While the fighting in the Lebanese Civil War was principally Muslim against Christian, the factions were also divided along political and ideological lines. At least initially, religious differences were secondary as evidenced by the loose alliance between Christian and Sunni leaders who were generally allied along a conservative political ideology. This conservative coalition called the "status quo" faction was confronted by various "reformist" movements made up of radical Islamic and socialist elements within Lebanon. These reformist movements were principally made up disenfranchised Christians Muslims, Druze and Palestinians with leftist ideological leanings.[7] The fighting was confined to the borders of Lebanon but like most civil wars, it was fueled by arms, supplies and training from dozens of countries all vying for political influence throughout the region.[8] The factional fighting lasted over 15 years and ultimately was only brought to an end when the Syrian military defeated the primarily Christian elements of the Lebanese Army in 1990.

The spark that ignited the initial violence in 1975 is debatable, but there is little doubt among scholars that the complex Lebanese governmental structure coupled with a massive influx of Palestinian refugees, a growth of sectarian militias and a fragmented national army created a permissive environment vulnerable to violence. Contributing to the spread of the factional fighting and the unprecedented levels of violence was a weak, disjointed and less than wholehearted international reaction to the Lebanese conflagration. Even when faced with the unprecedented levels of violence in 1975, the United States in particular was reluctant to step forward and assist the Lebanese government like it had in 1958 under the auspices of the Eisenhower Doctrine. Understanding the context of the era, can give insight into why President Ford's administration was reluctant to lead (even when implored to do so), and chose instead to

[7] Evron, Yair, *War and Intervention in Lebanon: The Israeli-Syrian Deterrence Dialogue* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 10.

[8] Chamie, Joseph, *Days of Tragedy 1975-1976* (New Brunswick:Transaction Books, 1984), 23.

work diplomatic back channels through intermediaries in order to address the Lebanese Civil War.

Beginning in 1948, the political atmosphere of the Middle East became gradually more volatile with the rise of Arab nationalism, socialist movements, decolonization efforts and the ongoing struggle for regional ideological dominance waged between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Through it all, Lebanon appeared to be the lone exception to the religious and political strife engulfing the Middle East. Lebanon was a relatively stable confessional style democracy with a thriving economy built on banking and tourism. Lebanon was also unique in the region owing to its well deserved reputation for ethnic and religious tolerance. Indeed, the Lebanese had a popular saying that although "all five fingers are different; they are all part of the same hand."[9] Unfortunately the relative peace and co-existence of Lebanon was slowly unraveling. The world around Lebanon was changing rapidly and the country would be inexorably changed as well. Perhaps unbeknownst to its framers, the seeds of the Lebanese Civil War were sown in its own foundational documents, the 1943 Lebanese Constitution and the controversial "National Pact".[10] Coupled with ideological intransigence and rapidly changing demographics, these documents and agreements ultimately lead to one of the most violent internal conflicts in modern history.

By the time violence erupted in 1975, the gravity of the situation was not immediately grasped by the western powers. The world was focused on the possibility that a substantial peace agreement was nearing fruition between Egypt and Israel following their 1973 war. Vital to the success of any lasting peace in the region was the continued issue of the Palestinians and prior to the outbreak of violence in Lebanon there was a genuine international willingness to tackle the

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[9] Chamie, *Days of Tragedy 1975-1976,* 34.

[10] Dupuy, Trevor, M. and Martell, Paul, *Flawed Victory, the Arab Israeli Conflict and the 1982 War in Lebanon* (Fairfax, VA: Hero Books, 1986), 12.

Palestinian dilemma. A solution to the Palestinian dilemma had been sought since 1970 following

their expulsion from Jordan and subsequent resettlement in southern Lebanon.  Most of the Arab

world was incensed at the Egyptian peace overtures towards Israel and the era of Pan Arab

cooperation was waning.

With Egypt's pursuit of a separate peace with Israel, the Syrian leadership sought to

establish itself as the new leader of the Arab world. Once close allies, by 1975 Syria and Egypt

were outwardly hostile and openly working against one another's efforts at regional influence and

leadership. Ba'athism, radical Islam, cultural revolutions, declining oil revenues, wide scale

economic disparity and leftists' movements all set the stage for regional instability and violence.

Ominously, all of these elements converged and vied for influence inside Lebanon. These factors

coupled with the fact that the United States was still licking its wounds from Vietnam and facing

a serious economic malaise contributed greatly to why the U.S. was reluctant to intervene. The

U.S. was hesitant to be drawn into any position where a substantive military intervention would

derail peace initiatives or further destabilize the region. In fact according to Dr Kissinger, the

U.S. "never had and we have no intention of putting American forces into Lebanon".[11]

Unlike 1958 when Lebanon had considerable strategic significance on the ideological

battlefield of the Cold War, by 1975 the U.S. desire for influence in the Middle East centered on

the major oil producing nations and the ongoing rapprochement with Egypt and Iran.[12] Clearly by

the time the fighting broke out in 1975, the U.S. and other western powers saw no immediate

threat to their national or strategic interests and France was the only western nation to even

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[11] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Dr. Henry Kissinger, LTG Scowcroft and SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld. April 8 1976.  (09:45-10:45) the White House Cabinet Room, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

[12] Khalaf, Samir, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001), 6. The era of détente had ushered in a more cooperative nature between the US and USSR by 1975. In 1958, the region was rocked by crisis and revolution and Lebanon was the one country in the region to openly identify with the West and request help under the Eisenhower Doctrine.

consider sending in troops to Lebanon at the height of the fighting by 1976.[13] The U.S. was reluctant to support the French initiative and many have argued the U.S. followed an official policy of disengagement with regards to the Lebanese Civil War. Noted Middle East scholar Fawaz Gerges has even argued that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's halfhearted efforts at diplomacy were in recognition of a belief that Lebanon was precarious and the notion that Lebanon was a "strategic safety valve wherein Arab-Israeli tensions could be released without the threat of a major Arab-Israeli confrontation".[14]

This paper is a historical analysis of the root causes of the Lebanese Civil War through an examination of Lebanese political processes and the formation of the modern state of Lebanon. Additionally, this paper examines the U.S. presidential decisions and behind the scenes negotiations conducted by the Ford Administration that resulted in the abdication of U.S. leadership and influence in the Middle East in 1975. By examining recently declassified documents and White House memoranda of conversations, this paper shows how the U.S. failure to act decisively, invited and in fact condoned the Syrian military invasion of Lebanon which has ultimately resulted in Syrian domination of Lebanese politics that continues to this day.[15]

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[13] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Ambassador Meloy and Dr Kissinger. Monday, May 10 1976 (10:00-10:29) the Oval Office, Gerald Ford Presidential Library. In this meeting Dr. Kissinger told the President that the French were thinking of sending troops to Beirut to separate the factions and keep the Syrians primarily in the eastern part of Lebanon.

[14] Gerges, Fawaz, "*Lebanon*" in Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim, eds. *The Cold war and the Middle East.* Oxford Clarendon Press, 1997, 78.

[15] Deeb, Marius, *"How to Safeguard the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon."* In a Statement for the Hearing of the House Committee International Relations, (JUL 2005). Deeb explains that the Cedar Revolution of 2005 was a direct attempt by the people of Lebanon to end the continued Syrian military occupation of Lebanon and to enact election reforms that would bring back representative consociational democracy.

# The Formation of Modern Lebanon

Any discussion on the 1975 Lebanese Civil War must first begin with an introduction to the creation of Lebanon as a modern country. The study of the formative years of Lebanon is necessary in order to better understand the complicated contributory factors that that led to violence and the subsequent US military intervention and policy decisions. From 1943 to 1975, political, religious and economic tensions combined to set the conditions for what would escalate into one of the bloodiest civil wars in modern history.

Prior to World War I, the area known as Lebanon was generally confined to the northern mountain ranges centered on Mount Lebanon and extending to Tripoli and Sidon.[16] The population of this area was dominated by the Maronite (Catholic) Christians, and to a lesser extent the Druze, which can best be characterized as an offshoot of Islam typified by principles similar to Shia Islam. After the defeat of the Ottoman Turks and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, the French government received Mandate over both Syria and Mount Lebanon.[17]

In an effort to strengthen the economic position of the pro-French Maronite population, the French government expanded the borders of Mount Lebanon to create what French General Henri Gouraud called "Le Grand Liban" and the newly redrawn borders of Lebanon now incorporated the sprawling cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, Tyre and the Bekaa plains. With this expansion, the population of Lebanon now included a large population of Sunni and Shia Muslims.[18] Even with these newly incorporated areas, an uneasy coexistence emerged with

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[16] Khalidi, Walid, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 34.

[17] Choueiri, Youssef, *Breaking the Cycle, Civil Wars in Lebanon* (London, UK: Stacy International, 2007), 26.

[18] Deeb, Marius, *The Lebanese Civil War,* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1980), 122.

Muslims and Christians. By the late 1930s, the majority of Muslims accepted a Lebanese identity in exchange for political equality and the promise of Lebanese independence.[19]

As early as 1930, many Lebanese Christians and Druze alike were worried about the enlarged borders and the subsequent expanded Muslim population. Many nationalists Lebanese led by the Maronite President Emile Edde tried to persuade the French government to "amputate" Tripoli and the Shia dominated southern portions of Lebanon in order to preserve a Christian majority.[20] The French government was unconvinced, and although the Maronites still constituted a majority within the modern borders of Lebanon, the ethnic, cultural and religious balance of the country had been irreversibly altered.
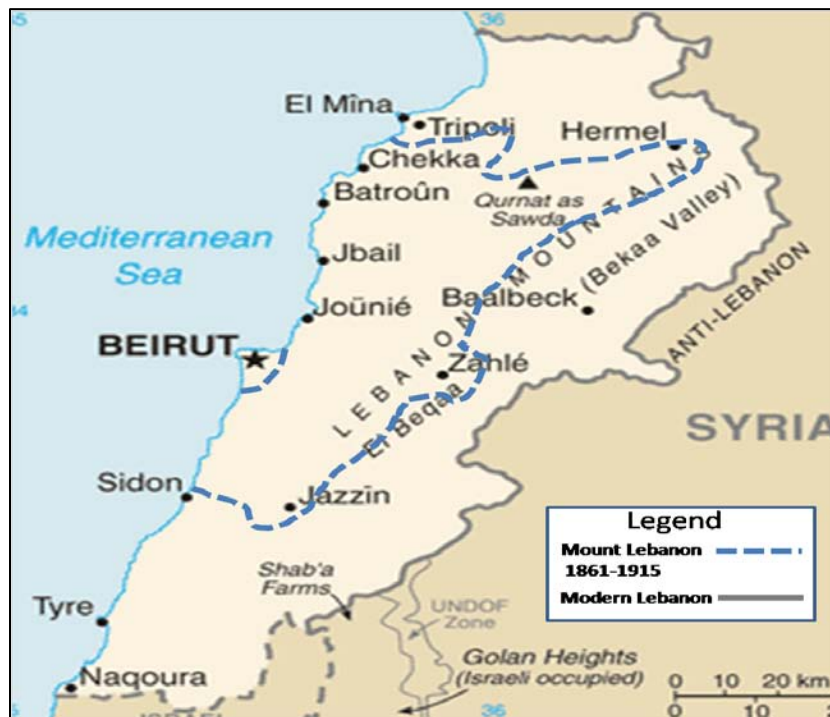


Map1. Smaller and Greater Lebanon.

In 1943, Lebanon received its independence from France and began working towards the formation of a governmental system that would take into account the complex religious, cultural

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[19] Choueiri, *Breaking the Cycle, Civil Wars in Lebanon*, 27.

[20] Rabinovich, Itamar, *The War for Lebanon 1970-1985* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Press, 1984), 22.

and communal differences of the population. What emerged was a political system that was very similar to the Mount Lebanon system of confessional government that was first instituted in 1860 when the region was ruled under a non-Lebanese governor. The construct of the 1860 government was centered on a council of four Maronites, three Druze, two Greek Orthodox Christians, one Melchite, one Shia, and one Sunni Muslim.[21] This complicated power sharing system with some influences from the French parliamentary system would become the principal foundation of the system adopted by the Lebanese political elites in 1943.

The basic tenets of the Lebanese system of government outlined in the 1943 Constitution would look familiar to students of modern parliamentary democracies. In accordance with the Lebanese Constitution, the Chamber of Deputies is elected on a proportional basis of six Maronites for every five Muslims. These elected Deputies then elect the Lebanese President, who in-turn selects a Prime-Minister who then forms the Presidential cabinet.[22] While this representative form of government seems familiar to Western observers, several power sharing caveats agreed upon by the Maronites and Sunnis harkened back to the 1860 Mt. Lebanon system.

In deference to their economic and cultural dominance within Lebanon, the Maronites were allocated the most powerful positions within the Lebanese government. Accordingly, the positions of President and Chief of Staff of the Lebanese Armed Forces were allocated by law to Maronite politicians and appointees. It was also agreed that in order to add balance, the Prime Minister should always be a Sunni Muslim, and the Minister of Defense a Druze and the Chairman of the Parliament Chairman should always be a Shia.[23]

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[21] Evron, *War and Intervention in Lebanon: The Israeli-Syrian Deterrence Dialogue*, 2.

[22] Chamie, Joseph, "The Lebanese Civil War: An Investigation into the Causes," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, (April 2001), 3.

[23] Evron, *War and Intervention in Lebanon: The Israeli-Syrian Deterrence Dialogue,* 3.

This complicated system of power sharing and political caveats is a result of an oral compromise made between the Sunni leader Riad-el-Sulh and the Maronite leader Bishara al-Khuri called the National Pact.[24] This coalition of the two dominant political entities ensured that the fledgling Lebanese system of government remained united. The formula of the National Pact basically stipulated that the Christians must recognize the Arab character of Lebanon and the Sunnis to recognize that Lebanon is an independent state and should never merge or be absorbed by its Arab neighbors (specifically Syria).[25]  Indeed, until the outbreak of the 1975 Civil War it can be argued that the Lebanese system functioned fairly efficiently, with the one notable exception being the violence of 1958.

According to Dr. Brenda Seaver, author of "The Regional Sources of Power Sharing Failure: The Case of Lebanon," in some cases the Lebanese government rivaled most western democracies for stability and liberty. Her assertion is illustrated by the fact that "the Lebanese system persisted for thirty-two years and endured periods of severe strain; including the 1958 civil war, and represents the most successful case of consociational democracy in the developing world".[26] Under this umbrella of political stability Lebanon became a major Middle-Eastern economic and banking power, but the relative peace was slowly unraveling.

While the Lebanese Constitution created a modern and effective governing system, the document was not entirely clear on a number of issues. For example the constitutional framers made no reference on how exactly to determine the "proportional" disposition of Muslims to Christian voters when determining the Chamber of Deputies seats.  Specifically lacking in the document is any discussion of a census, ensuring that large numbers of Muslim citizens remained

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[24] Saouli, Adham,  "Lebanon's Hizbullah; The Quest for Survival" *World Affairs Volume 166, No.2*, (2003), 71.

[25] Choueiri, *Breaking the Cycle, Civil Wars in Lebanon*,  29.

[26] Seaver, Brenda M, "The Regional Sources of Power Sharing Failure: The Case of Lebanon," *Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 115 Issue 2*, (2003), 3.

unrepresented even as their population grew throughout the decades. Additionally, the National Pact which allocated the key positions within the government based on religious and cultural identifications seemed to fly in the face of the Lebanese Constitution, specifically, Article 12. Article 12 stated that every citizen had the right to hold public office with only their competence and merit as prerequisites for the position.[27] Another overlooked power sharing aspect of the National Pact was the agreement that the Lebanese Muslims would make no attempt to incorporate Lebanon into a greater Pan-Arab state and that the Maronites would not seek military or economic assistance from Western powers. Essentially, the Lebanese Government operated under the conflicting guidance of both the Constitution and the National Pact. In 1958, these seemingly innocuous political compromises and contradictions would be at the heart at the first real test of the Lebanese government.

Prior to the violence in 1958, a series of international and internal events began to expose the seams and relative fragility of the Lebanese system of government. Following the Suez Crisis of 1956, Arab nationalism and pro-Nasser support was on the rise throughout the Middle East. Egyptian President Nasser was seen as an Arab hero who had stood up to the West and held great populist sway throughout the region. Capitalizing on the populist support, Egypt and Syria established the United Arab Republic in 1958 and called for the establishment of a pan-Arab state, which would naturally include Lebanon.

Throughout the Arab world, pro-Nasser sentiment and large rallies of support were widespread, compelling many Arab governments including Lebanon to openly support the Egyptian leader in order to curry favor with their internal masses.[28] The United States

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[27]*The Lebanese Constitution: A Reference Edition in English Translation*, prepared by the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration, (Beirut, Lebanon: American University Press, 1960).

[28] Nir, Omri, "The Shi'ites during the 1958 Lebanese Crisis," *Middle Eastern Studies, Vol.40, No.6* (November 2004), 2.

government at this time was seeking to mitigate socialist influences in the Middle East and to promote regional stability. The collapse of European colonial influence in the region created a power vacuum allowing Leftist movements and Socialists movements to take root in the region. To curtail this threat and increase influence in the strategic region, the US implemented the Eisenhower Doctrine. Under the Eisenhower Doctrine, a country could request American economic and/or military assistance if it felt threatened by armed aggression from another state.[29]

By 1958, religious and social tensions within Lebanon began to intensify. This escalation was principally due to the continued influences of Arab nationalism, anti-western ideologies and the wide scale dissatisfaction with the results of the parliamentary elections, in which anti-Egyptian politicians under Sami al-Suhl swept to victory.[30] Then in a striking affront to the National Pact compromises, the new Lebanese government led by President Chamoun further distanced itself from Pan-Arab sentiment by taking a pro-Western stance and adopting the Eisenhower Doctrine. Emboldened, President Chamoun even began political maneuvering among the members of the Chamber of Deputies in order to select his own successor, or more controversially to propose running for re-election himself. [31]

Chamoun's political adversaries both reformist and conservative united against his radical policies. Chamoun's opponents drew encouragement and support from Egypt and Syria, who saw this as an opportunity to finally eradicate western influence and incorporate Lebanon into the United Arab Republic. Interestingly, many pro-western politicians and moderate Christians joined the Muslim led reformist opposition in an effort to block the unconstitutional reelection of President Chamoun to a second term. Even the Maronite patriarch Bulus Butrus al-Maushi sided with the Muslim led opposition and would eventually support the reformist leaders

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[29] U.S. State Department Official Website.  http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/lw/82548.html

[30] Nir, "The Shi'ites during the 1958 Lebanese Crisis", 4.

[31] Choueiri, *Breaking the Cycle, Civil Wars in Lebanon*,  27.

in the violence to come.[32]  While all these political machinations created a volatile environment,

it is generally agreed that the spark that ignited the violence in 1958 was the assassination of

Nasib-al-Matani, the editor of the leftist "Telegraph" newspaper in Beirut on 8 May. Violent

clashes erupted which soon escalated into wide scale open fighting between pro-Nasserite and

Chamounist followers in Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon and Tyre.[33]

The fighting in 1958 mainly pitted the Christian Phalangist militias against the Lebanese

Syrian Nationalists with the factions generally split along economic, religious and political

ideological lines. Although the large Lebanese Shia population was not a major faction in the

1958 fighting, an invalid assumption made at the time by many Lebanese Christian leaders (and

one that would have impacts in 1975) was the belief that the Shiites could be counted on as a

natural ally against the Sunni Muslims. Instead, the Shia populace began to coalesce with the ever

increasing number of Palestinian refugees in order to form an alliance centered on economic and

political injustices and ignoring sectarian religious differences.[34]

In 1958, the Palestinians were not yet politically united enough to be a major force in the

fighting, but large numbers of individual Palestinians participated on both sides of the conflict.

As Kamal Salabi stated in *Crossroad to Civil War*, "No government measures could prevent the

growth of a natural symbiosis between the Palestinian refugees who were predominately Sunni

and the Shiite slum dwellers on the peripheries of the suburbs of Beirut and the other large

cities".[35]  The economically disenfranchised Shiite masses were also susceptible to influence

from Iran, a country that the Lebanese Government mistakenly considered an ally in 1958.

Sensing that the situation was escalating, and finding himself incapable of persuading the Army

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[32] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 119.

[33] Chamie, "The Lebanese Civil War: An Investigation into the Causes",  3.

[34] Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon 1970-1985,* 28.

[35] Salabi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958-1976*, 10.

to intervene in support of the Phalangist militias against the reformist militias, President

Chamoun sought military assistance from the United States.[36]

In a pattern that would later repeat itself in 1975, the Lebanese Army remained largely

neutral in 1958. The Army's policy was to only intervene to protect non-combatant civilians and

to keep the major road networks and the Beirut International Airport open and functioning. The

Army's commander, a Maronite named Fu'ad Shihab intervened just enough to prevent the

overthrow of President Chamoun but would not go as far as to employ the Army to crush the

rebellion. General Shihab, who is credited with creating the modern Lebanese Army after WWII,

persevered in keeping the Army united during the 1958 crisis.[37]  With the Lebanese Army

maintaining neutrality, Chamoun turned to the West, specifically the US under the auspices of the

Eisenhower Doctrine. Although Lebanon was not facing an armed external threat, the US

nonetheless intervened because Chamoun vigorously claimed that Lebanon faced a serious

challenge from socialist elements within the country. In response to the growing regional unrest

and Pan-Arab momentum, most notably the 14 July Iraqi Revolution, the US government decided

to intervene militarily on behalf of the Lebanese Government.[38]

President Eisenhower responded on 15 July 1958 and authorized OPERATION BLUE

BAT, the military intervention on behalf of the Lebanese government. This was the first military

application of the new Eisenhower Doctrine and the military objective was clear. The mission of

the US forces was to bolster President Chamoun's pro-western government in response to internal

socialist influences and the perceived external threat posed by Syria and Egypt.[39] The operational

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[36] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 116.

[37] Picard, Elizabeth, *Lebanon, a Shattered Country: Myths and Realites of the Wars in Lebanon*, (New York, NY: Holmes & Meier, 1996), 33.

[38] Bordon, Margaret M, "US Intervention in Lebanon-1958," *Military Review* (Feb 1976), 66.

[39] Gray, David W. MG (R), "The U.S. Intervention in Lebanon, 1958: A Commander's Reminiscence," (Ft Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1984), 5.

plan for OPERATION BLUE BAT called for US forces to initially occupy and secure the Beirut International Airport. Following the securing of the airport, US forces would then secure the key port facilities and secure the approaches to the city of Beirut.[40]

At its height OPERATION BLUE BAT involved approximately 14,000 soldiers, sailors and Marines drawn mainly from German and Mediterranean based units. The three month long operation succeeded in stabilizing and strengthening the Chamoun regime and mitigating the violence even without US troops participating in direct combat operations. As Rod LaPearl, a 17-year-old private in the 187th Airborne stated years later, "As young men, we were still holding out for the possibility that something would occur. But, apart from a few random incidents of fire, the rebels were obviously more afraid of us back then, than many of them are today".[41]

Following OPERATION BLUE BAT and at the urging of the US government, Chamoun decided to withdraw his name from Presidential consideration, thus avoiding a constitutional crisis. With the political impasse resolved, and the subsequent election of General Fu'ad Shihab as president, the crisis of 1958 came to an end. Overall the events of 1958 had a sobering effect on the Lebanese populace in that it demonstrated the potential destructive nature of extremist policies and views.  The 1958 violence marked a significant watershed in Lebanese history as it was the first major breakdown in the Lebanese political order foreshadowing that the Lebanese system may not be able to cope with the simmering tensions for much longer. [42] With the decline of pan-Arab and Nasserite sentiments within Lebanon, the pressures on the Lebanese government to institute sweeping reforms was somewhat alleviated.[43]

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[40] Shulimson, Jack, *Marines in Lebanon 1958* (Washington, D.C.: The Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 1960), 7.

[41] Soussi, Alasdair, "50 Years later, US Marines Remember the 1958 US Intervention in Lebanon." *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, (July 2008), 28.

[42] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon,* 105.

[43] Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon 1970-1985*, 29.

# Lessons Forgotten from 1958 and Growing Instability

In an effort to heal the wounds of the 1958 Civil War, President Shihab attempted to implement significant concessions and reforms aimed at the growing and numerically superior Muslim population. These ambitious reforms merely masked the fundamental flaws in the Lebanese political system. Ultimately the Lebanese political system was flawed because of its reliance on quotas and oral agreements made between the leaders of the Christian and Sunni factions. The confessional system (though somewhat successful) was a biased system that placed true political power in the hands of the Sunni and Maronite political elites based on the constructs of the National Pact.

Conservative Christian and Sunni Muslim politicians obviously resisted any of Shihab's proposed substantive changes to the current system. These conservative politicians formed an unlikely alliance based on their belief that changes could negate their long held political, economic and social advantages.[44] Most importantly, they feared that any change or concessions could mobilize the large Muslim communities to political action and eventually lead to even greater irreversible social reforms.[45]

President Shihab recognized the growing power of the large Palestinian population and remembered their participation, albeit uncoordinated, in the 1958 violence. President Shihab was not content to allow the Palestinians to become politically mobilized, and he correctly surmised that their guerilla activities invited continued Israeli retaliatory attacks. Not content to allow the PLO's power to grow unchecked, President Shihab created the "Deuxieme Bureau", an intelligence agency that enabled the government to quell opposition movements and monitor the large Palestinian Refugee camps.[46] By 1973, the continued influx of refugees and PLO

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[44] Choueiri, *Breaking the Cycle, Civil Wars in Lebanon*, 33.

[45] Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon 1970-1985*, 30.

[46] Salabi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958-1976,* 11.

militiamen had swelled the Palestinian population to over 450,000.[47] The permissive Lebanese immigration laws that allowed the Palestinians to establish large settlements and the Lebanese Government's disjointed efforts to control and integrate them into the general Lebanese society would have repercussions.

Following the 1967 Israel victory over the Arab armies, the Palestinian resistance groups resorted to increased acts of terror aimed at Israel. After being ousted from its Jordanian sanctuary in 1970, enormous numbers of Palestinian militiamen as well as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) headquarters had moved into southern Lebanon.[48] Ultimately, the Lebanese government was not prepared militarily, socially, or politically for the arrival of the Palestinian masses in the early 1970s.[49] The PLO now operating from its newly relocated headquarters, continued to conduct attacks against Israel from its positions of relative sanctuary inside southern Lebanon.

The Israeli military responses were as predictable as they were destructive and caused a mass migration of Lebanese civilians from southern Lebanon to the urban centers, most notably Beirut. In May 1973, an Israeli commando raid was successful in assassinating three high level PLO leaders in their headquarters in downtown Beirut.[50] The Lebanese Army was impotent in the face of the Israeli incursion and long simmering distrust between the Palestinians and the Lebanese Armed Forces erupted into open conflict. The fighting ultimately escalated to the point that the Lebanese Air Force resorted to bombing Palestinian positions within the teeming refugee

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[47] Chamie, *Days of Tragedy1975-1976*, 17.

[48] Avi-Ran, Reuven, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon Since 1975* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 22.

[49] O'Balance, Edgar, *Civil War in Lebanon 1975-1992* (New York: St Marten's Press, 1998), 24.

[50] Chamie, "The Lebanese Civil War: An Investigation into the Causes", 174.

camps. After two weeks of fierce fighting, international pressure from Egypt and Syria forced an end to the fighting and resulted in the signing of the "Melkart Protocol".[51]

The "Melkart Protocol" was an addendum to the shaky 1969 Cairo Agreement. The Cairo Agreement was originally brokered to codify the relationship between the PLO and the Lebanese Government. The Cairo Agreement permitted Palestinian civilians residing in Lebanon to lawfully participate in armed struggle against Israel. Additionally, Palestinian guerillas were granted the right of autonomous security and political control over the refugee camps and were allowed to conduct military training and store weapons in the camps as well.[52] With the signing of the "Melkart Protocol" and the continued northward exodus of Lebanese civilians, the demographics of the major Lebanese population centers were further altered. Another ominous result of the "Melkart Protocol" was that southern Lebanon in effect became a legal sanctuary from which the PLO could stage, recruit, equip, train and execute attacks against Israel.

In this charged atmosphere of increased sectarian, political, and ideological tensions, the Lebanese government seemed incapable of solving these complex issues through the political process. Christian Conservative politicians most notably Pierre Gemayel the founder of the Kataeb (Phalange) party, were adamantly opposed to the demands for political changes that would eliminate the caveats outlined in the National Pact. Gemayel repeatedly warned the Lebanese people about the dangers of "Palestinian anarchy".[53] Not even a joint speech given at the United Nations by President Frangieh and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat could ease the growing tensions between the Lebanese government and the PLO and sporadic violence again erupted. Muslims, who now constituted a clear a majority of the population, were openly

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[51] Odeh, B.J. Lebanon: *Dynamics of Conflict* (London, UK: Zed Books Ltd., 1985), 17.

[52] Sayah, Edward. *Lebanese Internal Divisions and Palestinian Guerilla Activity, 1967-1976* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press,1983), 66.

[53] Chamie, *Days of Tragedy 1975-1976*,  25.

questioning why the most powerful positions within the Lebanese government were reserved for the minority elements (Christians) of Lebanese society.

## A Splintered Country, Growth of the Militias

The Lebanese government again found itself incapable of dealing with the growing demands for political change and PLO violence. General social unrest and continued PLO demands for increased autonomy fueled the discontent throughout Lebanon. Throughout the early 70s, violent clashes continued between the Lebanese Army and PLO commando elements, particularly in the areas near the Israeli-Syrian border.[54] In a show of solidarity and support, many neighboring Arab countries including Syria expressed their support for the continued PLO presence in Lebanon. Facing both internal and external political pressures to stop fighting and restraining the PLO, the Lebanese government reluctantly restrained the Lebanese Army. The cessation of military actions effectively ceded control of large areas of southern Lebanon to the Palestinian Authority and PLO associated movements. In response, many Lebanese in these and other areas throughout the country turned to political, familial or village based militias for security in this period of instability.

The Christian militias were generally considered the best trained and equipped and of all of the Christian militias, the Phalange was by far the largest and most powerful. The Phalange was directly associated with the conservative Kataeb Party founded by Pierre Gemayel in 1936.[55] Beshir Gemayel, the son of Pierre Gemayel, was the leader of the Phalange and under his strong leadership the movement established several mountain training camps.[56] By 1975, the Phalange's

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[54] Salabi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958-1976*, 41.

[55] Sayah, Lebanese *Internal Divisions and Palestinian Guerilla Activity, 1967-1976*, 100.

[56] Rowayheb, Marwan G, "Lebanese Militias: A New Perspective." *Middle Eastern Studies Volume 42, No. 2*, (2006), 310.

strength had grown to over 6,000 well- trained members, and its strength allowed it to openly

defy government efforts to curb their activities. As arms shipments and recruitment increased, the

strength of the Phalange likely exceeded 100,000 by the end of 1976.[57] Former president

Chamoun's National Liberation Party (NLP) militia was another powerful, albeit much smaller

Christian militia. In 1975, the NLP numbered approximately 2,000 members but like the

Phalange, arms shipments and recruiting would swell its ranks over the coming years. These two

militias comprised the bulk of the Christian militia combat power and encompassed the

conservative political views of Lebanese Christians in response to Muslim calls for political,

economic and social changes.

The Muslim militias were less homogenous than their Christian counterparts and were

not always segregated along Islamic sectarian lines i.e. Sunni, Shia, and Druze. In spite of the

numerical superiority of the Muslim population, in 1975 there were really only two Lebanese

Muslim militias of any real military capability. These were the Kamal Jumblatt (Progressive

Socialist Party) militia and Imam Sadr's Amal (Hope) militia.[58] The Kamal Jumblatt militia was

comprised primarily of Druze Lebanese with the Amal militia drawing its members from the

large numbers of economically deprived Shia Muslims. While both of these militias were

reformist movements, Jumblatt advocated a leftist political ideology.

Kamal Jumblatt was an astute politician and was a direct descendant of the Jumblatt

family line that had led the Druze people for centuries.[59] As a member of the Lebanese Chamber

of Deputies and the Minister of the Interior, he openly supported the Palestinians in order to

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[57] O'Balance, *Civil War in Lebanon 1975-1992*, 15.

[58] Ibid., 16.

[59] Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 66. The Druze were in favor of Pan Arabism and the Palestinian resistance represented by the PLO. Most of the community supported Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party and fought alongside the leftist and Palestinian parties against the Lebanese Front.

garner support. Jumblatt and his movement aimed to reinvent Lebanon based on secularism, socialism, and an abolition of the sectarian confessional form of government.[60]

Imam Sadr characterized his Amal militia as a movement for the depressed, disenfranchised or the "Disinherited".[61] Amal drew the preponderance of its support from the displaced Shia community that had fled the Palestinian influx. Amal drew strength from the fertile recruiting grounds of the Beirut poverty belts which been had swelled by the continued northward exodus of Lebanese civilians (Shia) from the southern border regions due to the continued Israeli and PLO military clashes.[62] The Amal militia grew more powerful throughout 1975 and benefited through a covert affiliation with the PLO's Fatah militia. Through this association with the PLO, Amal militiamen received training, weapons and logistical support.[63]

Throughout the early 1970s, Yasser Arafat was careful to avoid any antagonistic or provocative moves towards the powerful Christian militias and continually denied supporting Amal and the various Muslim based militias. The PLO's machinations finally came to light when a massive explosion killed 48 Amal militiamen and their Fatah trainers during guerilla training in 1975.[64] At its peak, Amal would grow to over 14,000 members and would eventually spawn the radical Hezbollah movement in 1982.[65] In addition to Amal and Jumblatt, other key Muslim militias included "Al-Mourabitoun" or the Movement of Independent Nasserists and several smaller Pro-Syrian movements like the Syrian Saiqa.[66] Al-Mourabitoun had become a major political faction representing Sunni Muslims by 1970, emerging primarily as a reformist

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[60] Choueiri, *Breaking the Cycle, Civil Wars in Lebanon*, 40.

[61] O'Balance, *Civil War in Lebanon 1975-1992*, 15.

[62] Salabi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958-1976*, 45.

[63] O'Balance, *Civil War in Lebanon 1975-1992*, 16.

[64] Ibid., 15. Over 80 Muslim militiamen and Fatah trainers were injured as well.

[65] Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon Confrontation in the Middle East*, 14.

[66] O'Balance, *Civil War in Lebanon 1975-1992*, 16. The Saiqa movement would work directly with covert Syrian soldiers leading up to the 1976 Syrian invasion.

challenge to the conservative Christians and Sunnis in control of the Lebanese government [67]. In the early stages of the war, all of the Muslim militias were comparatively much weaker than their Christian counterparts. To compensate, all of the Muslim militias required and employed direct or indirect support from PLO fighters.[68]

The PLO leadership officially advocated neutrality in the tensions dividing Lebanon after the 1969 Cairo Agreement. However, as it has already been seen, the PLO was in fact supporting the Muslim militias with covert training and logistical support. The offensive capability of Palestinian guerillas first became known in 1968 when they began to establish training camps in the south of Lebanon. The PLO leadership recognized the fertile recruitment opportunities of the large refugee camps for fighters.[69]

The presence of armed guerillas in Lebanon posed a significant internal security risk to the Lebanese government and served as a major motivator for increased Pan-Arab sentiments within the Lebanese Muslim population. Conservative Lebanese politicians led by Pierre Jumayyil (alternatively spelled Gemayel) and the Kataeb Party began to attack the continued Palestinian commando presence in southern Lebanon. In February 1975, Jumayyil submitted for presidential consideration a proposed referendum on the Palestinian presence. Though the proposed measure was eventually shelved, the effort reflected a conservative determination to deal with the issue.[70] The Palestinian population inside Lebanon continued to grow following their expulsion from Jordan and the continued unrest in Israel and by 1975, Lebanon went from being just one of many countries in the region with Palestinian guerillas, to being their sole base of operations for the Palestinian Liberation Organization.[71]

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[67] Rowayheb, "Lebanese Militias: A New Perspective", 4.

[68] Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 106.

[69] Sayah, *Lebanese Internal Divisions and Palestinian Guerilla Activity, 1967-1976* , 45.

[70] Salabi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958-1976*, 92.

[71] Sayah, *Lebanese Internal Divisions and Palestinian Guerilla Activity, 1967-1976*, 69.

# The Violence Begins

By the spring of 1975 there were real hopes throughout the Middle East that Egypt and Israel could negotiate a general peace accord following their 1973 War. When Egypt elected to pursue a unilateral peace accord with Israel, most Lebanese feared that their struggling democracy would be caught in the middle of the escalating Egyptian and Syrian rhetoric. Conservative Lebanese politicians feared that any peace process not involving Syria and addressing the Palestinian question, would leave the Palestinian issue unresolved and Lebanon would be forced to continue to struggle with the growing Palestinian influence within their borders.[72] Although negotiations between the Lebanese government and the Palestinian leadership would benefit both groups, neither side could convince their supporters of the necessity after years of animosity and violence. Christian conservatives were adamantly opposed to any settlement and the Palestinian leadership could not afford to alienate their radical base of support by negotiating with the Lebanese establishment.[73] Thus with peace negotiations underway between Israel and Egypt; in Lebanon, neither side was willing to relent and negotiate in an effort to alleviate growing unrest.

Political impasses, armed militias, leftist movements, economic inequalities, and regional instability were all converging in Lebanon to create a volatile atmosphere. It was perhaps just a matter of time until the tensions led to violence, but generally there are two events that most historians point to as the sparks that ignited the Lebanese Civil War. The first happened just two weeks after the introduction of the Jumayyil memorandum; when fishermen in the coastal city of Sidon protested the nationalization of the fishing industry.[74] All along the Lebanese coast

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[72] Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon*, 164.

[73] Salabi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958-1976,* 90.

[74] Evron, *War and Intervention in Lebanon: The Israeli-Syrian Deterrence Dialogue,* 10.

Lebanese fishermen chanted "we are all fish about to be eaten by a Shark".[75] In February 1975, the fishermen of Sidon began to protest the establishment of the Protein Company which they saw as an attempt by the Lebanese government to nationalize the fishing industry.[76]

Encouraged by Communist sympathizers, local Sidonese leader Maaruf Saad led a large demonstration on 26 February to protest the government's nationalization initiatives. During the march, multiple shots were fired by an unseen assassin(s) and Saad was mortally wounded.[77] Public outrage was swift, and soon large demonstrations and labor strikes erupted in Sidon, Tyre and even in the slums and outskirts of Beirut. After Saad's funeral on March 6th, the demonstrations and civil unrest grew in intensity and the ensuing clashes between the demonstrators and the Army resulted in 19 civilians killed and dozens more wounded. The Sidon incident encapsulated and illustrated the growing complexity of the Lebanese situation.

The events in Sidon, illustrated how all the major competitors vying for control of Lebanese political power were combining to destabilize the country. In the Sidon unrest, Palestinian commandos supported the reformist Lebanese militias in clashes with the Army. The Maronites saw the Palestinian militia interventions on behalf of the reformists as proof of PLO meddling in Lebanese affairs and supported the Lebanese Army in the clashes. Politicians of the reformist National Movement and other radical Muslim movements saw the Army as an instrument of the Maronite controlled big business and called for restraint.[78] Unfortunately for all involved following the Sidon violence, the Lebanese government rejected all calls for political and military reform.

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[75] Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon*, 163.

[76] Salabi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958-1976*, 92.

[77] Chamie, *Days of Tragedy 1975-1976*, 28.

[78] Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon Confrontation in the Middle East*, 44.

To the reformist Muslim leadership and Imams, the government's support of the Army's leadership was a confirmation that the Army was pro-Christian and therefore justified the continued Muslim challenges and armed resistance.[79] By the end of the month, further demonstrations, strikes and violent clashes were country-wide and tensions were very high. While the calls for political reforms went unheeded, the tensions escalated across Lebanon. On 13 April 1975, the "Sarajevo of the Lebanese Civil War occurred in Ain Rummaneh", a large Christian suburb of Beirut.[80] It has never been conclusively proven who fired the shots that killed two of Pierre Gemayel's bodyguards, but it's generally agreed that this event initiated the general conflagration.

The attempted assassination of Pierre Gemayel, the leader of the Phalange, was avenged later in the day when members of Gemayel's Phalange militia ambushed a busload of Palestinians. The attack on the bus resulted in the killing of all 28 Palestinians on board and was widely seen as a disproportionate response to the attack on Gemayel.[81] Both sides rushed to arms and by the end of the day, violent clashes had erupted nationwide between the predominately Muslim National Movements, the Palestinian militias and the Phalangist militias. The political repercussions of the violence were just as disastrous.

By the 15th of May, the Lebanese government was in disarray. The Prime Minister along with 11of his cabinet ministers (all Muslims) resigned in protest of the government's handling of the Ain Rummaneh and Sidon violence.[82] Following the violence in Ain Rummaneh, Yasser Arafat called for the prohibition of the Phalangist militias. Ironically, Arafat earlier had specifically stated that the PLO was not a party to Lebanese domestic issues, but in a

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[79] Odeh, *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, 131.

[80] Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon Confrontation in the Middle East*, 47.

[81] Chamie, *Days of Tragedy 1975-1976*, 37.

[82] O'Balance, *Civil War in Lebanon 1975-1992*, 6.

contradictory move, he made no attempt to restrain the Palestinian militias engaged in the fighting.[83] On 23 May, President Franjieh installed a confessional style military cabinet derisively known as the "soldiers' cabinet" which was composed of four Christians, three Muslims, and a Druze.[84] This pleased the Christian population that was hoping for a strong handed military response to the Palestinian and Muslim militias, but the military crackdown did not come and President Franjieh assured Yasser Arafat that the new government would honor the 1969 Cairo Agreement.

By the spring of 1976, the Lebanese government was completely powerless to stop the violence and its one instrument of remaining influence was disintegrating. The once powerful and professional Lebanese Army was experiencing widespread desertions. The Lebanese Army, long a bastion of solidarity and impartiality, began to disintegrate along sectarian and religious lines and soon both Muslim and Christian soldiers were deserting in droves with many Muslims forming the nucleus of the Lebanese Arab Army and Christian soldiers rallying to the Phalangist cause.[85]

## The International Reaction and the Road to Invasion

From the creation of Lebanon in 1947, Syria had on principle refused to acknowledge its existence as a sovereign country.[86] Syria viewed Lebanon (much like it did Israel) as an artificial entity created by the Western powers. Syria not only supported early reformist movements against Chamoun's presidency but it had secretly been supplying the Palestinian movements with weapons and training throughout the 60s and early 70s. With the ongoing Egyptian and Israel

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[83] Odeh, *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, 132.

[84] Chamie, *Days of Tragedy 19975-1976*, 42.

[85] Odeh, *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, 153.

[86] Reuvan, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon since 1975*, 10.

peace overtures, Syria and specifically President Assad, saw the Lebanese Crisis and subsequent

Civil War as an opportunity to increase Syria's regional influence and prestige. Syria officially

broke politically with Egypt in September 1975 following the collapse of the Interim Sinai

Agreement and embarked on a new political path. Syria sought to create and lead a new Middle-

East power bloc consisting of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the PLO.[87]

Syria had long wanted to annex Lebanon, but because of Western protection and the very

strong Israeli military deterrent, the Syrian efforts to exert greater control over Lebanon had been

somewhat limited.[88] Now with the eruption of violence in Lebanon, President Assad used his

personal relationship with Lebanese President Franjieh to his advantage when the Lebanese

leader requested assistance from Damascus.[89] Syria's official stance following Ain Rummaneh

had been to simply assist the Lebanese government in mediating between the warring factions.

Working under the auspices of the United Nations, high level Syrian delegations visited Lebanon

frequently between April and December 1975 in an effort to negotiate between the factions and

the Lebanese government.[90] While Syria was actively pursuing a solution to the crisis albeit to

further their own desires, the United States was somewhat taken aback by the escalating violence.

The eruption of the civil war in 1975 did not come as a complete surprise to the Ford

Administration. The United States was aware of the growing unrest through its Lebanese and

Syrian embassies and ambassadors, but the intensity of the violence was unsettling to the

administration. In a conference with Pope Paul IV in June 1975, President Gerald Ford discussed

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[87] Reuvan, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon since 1975*, 21.

[88] Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 123.

[89] Hallenbeck, Ralph A, *Military Force as an Instrument of US Foreign Policy; Intervention in Lebanon, August 1982-February 1984* (New York, NY: Praeger Press, 1991), 3.

[90] Reuvan, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon since 1975*, 20. The first Syrian high level delegation arrived in Lebanon on 25 May, two days following the creation of the "soldiers' cabinet".

the issue of the Lebanese Civil War.[91] During the course of the Vatican meetings, Pope Paul IV

stated several times that the U.S. needed to accept a leading role in the region to end the violence

in Lebanon. President Ford responded to the Pope by saying that "we have a very great

opportunity, and I am trying as president to provide the, leadership that is so much needed in this

world. If the U.S. neglects its responsibility, we do not deserve the role that has been given to

us."[92] The Pope then reminded the President that Lebanon had been a shining example of

peaceful coexistence between the Christians and Muslims for many years and he believed that a

peaceful resolution was possible. The Pope went on to emphasize that the Palestinian issue had to

be addressed as he believed it to be the principle destabilizing factor in Lebanon. Dr. Kissinger

then asked if the Vatican would act as an intermediary for negotiations with Chairman Arafat so

that the U.S. administration could circumvent their official policy of no contact with the PLO

leadership. The Pope responded that not only would the Vatican assist the U.S., but that it had

already "received appeals from Palestinian leaders asking the U.S. to do something to put an end

to Lebanese violence."[93] Chairman Arafat was alarmed by the growing violence and in one of the

most glaring examples of a missed opportunity; the leader of the PLO told the Pontiff that the

Palestinian Liberation Organization was willing to formerly recognize the existence of Israel if

the U.S. would intercede to end the Lebanese violence.[94] These behind the scenes negotiations

were typical of the U.S. tactics when dealing with the Lebanese Civil War.

   The United States because of political considerations was not an overt leader in the

ongoing Lebanese negotiations. The Ford administration was however, working behind the

scenes through its ambassadors and considerable regional influence to achieve a peaceful

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[91] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Pope Paul IV, Dr. Henry Kissinger, and Cardinal Cook. June 3, 1975. The Vatican City. Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

resolution. Indeed, private discussions between President Ford, his Cabinet, regional Ambassadors, and U.S. spiritual leaders were ongoing throughout 1975 on ways to end or mitigate the violence.  Although the Lebanese Civil War was discussed privately, the President was clearly more concerned about the worsening U.S. economic crisis and healing the wounds of the Vietnam War. This is evident by a lack of any Presidential Policy Directives or Study Memoranda concerning the Lebanese Civil War or any mention of the conflict in either the 1975 or 1976 State of the Union addresses which are often used to unveil foreign policy initiatives.[95] In spite of the fact that the Ford administration did not issue any specific policy directives or initiatives in response to the Lebanese Civil War, the fact of the matter remains that the U.S. government was concerned and deliberated extensively behind closed doors.

As early as September 1975, President Ford was growing more concerned with the escalating fighting and bloodshed. The Ambassador to Syria Richard Murphy told the President on 19 November 1975, that President Assad admitted that the "arms supply was out of control and he is worried Lebanon could get out of hand".[96] While the U.S. discussed the various military options to evacuate its citizens from Lebanon, there were no discussions pertaining to a military intervention similar to what President Eisenhower had ordered in 1958. The U.S. limited its considerable involvement to behind the scenes diplomatic endeavors and military intervention was not envisioned. The U.S. quite simply saw the Lebanese Civil War as secondary to the ongoing Arab-Israeli peace negotiations and as Dr Kissinger stated "we have no intention of

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[95] Ford, Gerald R. *"Address before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union, January 15th 1975",* Gerald Ford Presidential Library. President Ford's addresses for 1975 and 1976 made no mention of the Middle East in general or Lebanon specifically. His focus for both speeches was clearly on the economic malaise and the continued struggle against the Soviet Union for ideological and military supremacy.

[96] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Dr. Henry Kissinger, Hon. Richard Murphy, and Lt General Brent Scowcroft. Wednesday, November 19, 1975 (10:35-10:44) the Oval Office, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

putting American forces into Lebanon". [97] The Ford administration's meandering diplomacy and behind the scenes overt and tacit encouragements to Syria would eventually result in the decision by President Assad to invade Lebanon in 1976.

The negotiations between the warring factions were complicated by all the aforementioned deep-seated political, religious and ideological divisions and a general unwillingness by all the parties to cede any ground or compromise. To the Syrian mediators' credit, they worked diligently through 1975 to find a political resolution and tried several different approaches. Ultimately however, the Syrians began to realize that the situation was deteriorating rapidly and "nothing seemed capable of stopping the worsening violence."[98] Outwardly Syria was playing the benevolent mediator, but behind the scenes the Syrian government continued to supply weapons and support to both the Palestinian and Muslim militias exacerbating the cycle of violence.[99]

By January 1976, it was clear to the Syrian government and most observers that the mediation efforts had failed. Intensified offensives by both Christian and Muslim militias had led to increased bloodshed and in the case of the Phalange's attack on the Quarantina refugee camp; there were claims of wide scale atrocities and previously unseen levels of destruction.[100] The Muslim militias reciprocated when a combined force of PLO, Muslim militia and PLA forces overran the Christian villages of Damour and Jiyeh, looting and burning the settlements.

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[97] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Dr. Henry Kissinger, LTG Scowcroft and SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld. April 8 1976. (09:45-10:45) the White House Cabinet Room, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

[98] Chamie, *Days of Tragedy 1975-1976*, 66.

[99] Reuvan, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon since 1975*, 21.

[100] Chamie, *Days of Tragedy 1975-1976*, 101. Both the Christian and Muslim militias burned and bulldozed captured villages during the course of the fighting.

Following the Muslim gains of in the winter of 1975 and spring of 1976, the Christian and

conservative leadership was on the precipice of disaster.[101]

The U.S. government's understanding of the situation in 1976 crystallizes the complexity

and convoluted nature of the conflict. In the words of Dr. Kissinger,

"Syria is supporting the conservatives and Christians against the PLO and the
Communists. Egypt is supporting the leftists and the PLO against Syria. The Soviet Union should
be supporting Syria, but it is also supporting the PLO. Israel is, of course, against the PLO and if
we don't restrain them there will be a UN Security Council meeting where we will either have to
condemn the Israeli actions or veto the resolution, either one of which is equally bad".[102]

Early efforts by the Syrians at a limited intervention to encourage a cease-fire were unsuccessful.

As early October 1975, Syria had begun sending large numbers of soldiers clad in civilian clothes

into Lebanon in an attempt to prop up the Christian militias in the face of mounting offensives by

the radicals.[103] However, by May 1976, the U.S. knew through diplomatic channels that President

Assad was planning to invade Lebanon with large mechanized force, and could do so in as little

as 48 hours. Indeed, the U.S. administration had contacted the Syrian leader on 23 March 1976,

and asked a series of complicated and vague questions with the specific purposes of  delaying the

pending invasion until Israel could be reassured.[104]

The U.S. administration was attempting to gain time in order to gauge the Israeli response

to any Syrian military intervention. In fact the U.S. was not against the Syrian invasion at all, as

Dr. Kissinger told President Ford on March 24th, "If Syria could go in quickly and clean it out, it

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[101] Chamie, *Days of Tragedy 1975-1976*, 66.

[102] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Dr. Henry Kissinger, LTG Scowcroft
and SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld. March 24 1976, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

[103] Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon*, 193.

[104] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Dr. Henry Kissinger, LTG Scowcroft
and SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld. March 24 1976, Gerald Ford Presidential Library. According to
Dr. Kissinger, the U.S. government asked the Syrians to examine a mulit-national Arab coalition
to end the violence but according to Kissinger, the purpose was to delay the invasion, by having
the Syrians examine several infeasible courses of action. The US was worried about any unilateral
action by the Syrians and the possibility of an Israeli military response.

would be good. They would leave the PLO in the same condition as they were in Jordan".[105] In

the same discussion, the special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, LTG

Brent Scowcroft cautioned the President that unless there was a substantial military intervention

in Lebanon, "the PLO would take over".[106] Unfortunately for the citizens of Lebanon, the U.S.

was not alone in its passivity; all the region's major actors seemed willing to let the Lebanese

violence continue to play out.

The Israelis were content to allow the violence to continue as long as it did not spill over

the border into Israel. The Jordanians who had exacerbated the Palestinian crisis in 1968 were

simply glad to finally be rid of the Palestinians. Egypt was happy to see Syria struggling to assert

any substantive influence in Lebanon and was actively obstructing Syrian mediation initiatives.

Syria's diplomatic failures in Lebanon were an Egyptian victory and further encouraged the

Egyptian pursuit of peace initiatives with Israel.[107] The United States was content to work for a

political solution from behind the scenes and with an ultimate goal of preventing a region wide

conflagration. Ultimately, the job of ending the Lebanese violence defaulted to the Syrians.

By January 1976, the U.S. administration had privately abandoned any hope that a

peaceful political solution to the violence could be worked-out. The Ford administration had also

come to realize that a united Arab force was not politically or militarily feasible. When President

Ford asked Egyptian President Sadat if there was a possibility that a united Arab force could

intervene in Lebanon under the banner of the Arab League, President Sadat simply replied

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[105] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Dr. Henry Kissinger, LTG Scowcroft and SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld. March 24 1976, Gerald Ford Presidential Library

[106] Ibid. The President was worried that Syrian intervention would lead to Israeli reprisals and wider regional escalation. Although all in attendance agreed that any Israeli response would add to the instability of the region, they were all in agreement that the U.S. should encourage Israeli inactivity and allow the Syrian military intervention.

[107] Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon 1970-1985*, 82.

"everybody is too busy to get involved".[108] This apathy towards a united Arab intervention was shared by many Arab leaders and was succinctly articulated by Jordan's King Hussein who stated that the idea was "complete nonsense".[109] Syria was not only encouraged by its Arab neighbors' reluctance to act, it was indeed urged and facilitated by the U.S. to act unilaterally.

In the U.S., President Ford was confronted with a myriad of social and economic issues not to mention the political concerns of a pending Presidential election. The economy was in decline and the political and national will for a military intervention following Vietnam was non-existent. The primary U.S. foreign policy goals in the Middle East centered on the oil producing nations and the Arab-Israeli peace initiatives. The ongoing Middle-East Peace negotiations hung in a delicate balance and it was surmised that any U.S. military intervention could derail the entire process. Even during these contentious and tumultuous times, many prominent Muslim and Christian leaders in the U.S. urged President Ford to intervene to stop the Lebanese violence.

On the 15th of April 1976, one month before the invasion, President Ford met with Muslim and Christian leaders in the Oval Office and discussed the issue of Lebanon. Phillip Saliba, the Chairman of the Standing Conference of American Middle Eastern Christian and Muslim Leaders, implored President Ford to intervene and told the President that the "only one who can save Lebanon is you".[110] President Ford told the assembled spiritual leaders that a political solution was desirable and that the official U.S. policy was an opposition to any Syrian or Israeli military intervention. But, as has previously been stated the U.S. was actually turning a

[108] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, President Sadat and Dr. Henry Kissinger. Tuesday, October 28, 1975 (10:40-10:50) The Oval Office, Gerald Ford Presidential Library

[109] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, King Hussein of Jordan and Dr. Henry Kissinger. Tuesday, March 31, 1976. (11:02- 12:35) The Oval Office, Gerald Ford Presidential Library. The conversation was in regards to the proposed multi-national force to intervene in Lebanon. King Hussein ultimately thought it to be only politically motivated to embarrass President Assad of Syria.

[110] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Philip Saliba, Imam Chirri, Bishop Zayek and Brent Scowcroft. Thursday April 15, 1976. (2:30-3:00) the White House Cabinet Room, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

blind eye to the ongoing Syrian "limited" intervention and was willing to accept a more substantial Syrian military intervention if the circumstances dictated, as the deliberations of 24 March illustrated.[111]

Prior to the Syrian full-scale invasion on 31 May 1976, the United States was keenly aware of, and indeed encouraging, the behind-the-scenes Syrian military intervention in Lebanon. The Syrians had for some time been infiltrating thousands of soldiers dressed as civilians in an attempt to prevent the total collapse of the Christian militias and to prevent an outright victory by the PLO and their radical allies.[112] This "limited" Syrian intervention was initially successful in preventing the collapse of the Christian militias and by January 1976 a shaky ceasefire had been implemented, which was encouraging to the U.S. desires for a diplomatic solution. Encouraged by the January ceasefire, the Syrians continued to prepare for an invasion but hesitated when asked by President Ford to forego the intervention.[113]

While President Ford outwardly balked at the Syrian preparations for invasion he voiced no objection to the nearly 3,000 Syrian soldiers already engaged in operations in support of the Christian militias. At the time, President Ford told Senator Javits that the U.S. had "asked Israel not to do anything" and that Rabin had shown great restraint not reacting to the news of thousands of Syrian soldiers in Lebanon. In fact the Syrian covert forces had not only been supporting the Christian militias, but they were also actively prepping for and conducting reconnaissance in support of the coming invasion.[114] In the same meeting with Senator Javits,

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[111] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Dr. Henry Kissinger, LTG Scowcroft and SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld. March 24 1976. (09:45-10:45) the Oval Office, Gerald Ford Presidential Library. The U.S. knew that by this time Syria already had thousands of troops in Lebanon assisting the Christian militias and had been working with Israel to deter an Israeli military response. Dr Kissinger also emphasized that a Syrian military intervention would be necessary if the tide turned against the Christian militias.

[112] Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon*, 193.

[113] Abraham, A.J. *The Lebanon War* (Bristol, CT: Praeger Press, 1996), 53.

[114] Ibid., 54.

President Ford praised Syrian President Assad as a true statesman for his efforts in brokering the soon-to-be short-lived January ceasefire.[115]

The January ceasefire was shattered in March with the Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt's pronouncement that a "total and irreversible" military campaign would be waged by the reformist forces to finally defeat the Phalange and the conservatives.[116] By May 1976 the U.S. government was deeply concerned that the Christians were on the verge of defeat and that this would indeed trigger a full scale Syrian escalation. In a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, President Ford asked the Israelis to use their considerable leverage with the Lebanese Christians to renew the ceasefire.[117] While the U.S. outwardly supported a political solution to the violence, records show that discreetly, they encouraged President Assad's covert moves and openly supported a Syrian military intervention if it appeared that the Christian and conservative militias were going to be defeated.[118]

The Syrian government began earnest preparation for the invasion of Lebanon following the collapse of the January ceasefire and the realization that many of its special units (al-Saiqa) commandos were becoming sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and thus may become unreliable

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[115] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Senator Jacob Javits and Max Friedersdorf. Wednesday April 14, 1976 (4:30-5:00) the Oval Office, Gerald Ford Presidential Library. As the senior Jewish lawmaker, Senator Javits was being sent to Israel to discuss the Lebanese situation and to relay to Rabin the U.S. appreciation of the remarkable restraint he displayed by not responding to the April 1976 Syrian intervention.

[116] Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*, 54.

[117] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford and Prime Minister Gold Meir. Wednesday May 19, 1976. (2:05-3:04) the Oval Office, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

[118] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford and Dr. Henry Kissinger. Tuesday March 30 1976 (9:40-10:20) the Oval Office. The meeting was in preparation for a meeting with President Assad of Syria. Dr. Kissinger stated that the President should "thank him for his constructive role. Kissinger said to then agree with Assad's solution, but express concern about the method. With a ceasefire, we could implement the Syrian political situation and Assad could sneak in some more forces. I think the Israelis would accept it under these circumstances". Kissinger went on to say that the U.S. and Lebanon would be better off not letting in more Syrian troops *unless the Christians are in danger of being wiped out"*.(emphasis added)

in the coming invasion.[119] Jumblatt's pronouncement was exactly the excuse President Assad needed to invade and put an end the violence. By May of 1976 it was clear to President Ford and various Arab leaders throughout the region that Syria was prepared to, and likely would invade Lebanon to end the violence. Egypt's President Sadat knew that any Israeli military reaction to the Syrian invasion could escalate the fighting and derail the peace process so he implored President Ford to "please make sure the Israelis do not intervene, nobody in the Arab world will believe there was no coordination".[120] President Sadat was torn between his desire to see Syria humiliated and his need to finalize his peace negotiations with the Israeli government. What President Sadat may or may not have known, is that the US was already coordinating with the Israelis to forestall any retaliation against the Syrians and to coordinate additional military and logistical support to the Christian militias.[121]

Just as the Syrians had been supplying the Muslim militias with arms, weapons and supplies prior to 1975, a nearly unfettered flow of arms and materiel was streaming into the conservative (Christian) militias prior to the Syrian invasion as well.  As Dr. Henry Kissinger stated in 1976, "The Christians are getting arms from Israel, which we do not oppose since it helps maintain the balance".[122] Not only were the arms flowing freely from the U.S. and Israel, the U.S. was diligently working with Syria to coordinate and prepare the path for any coming Syrian intervention. National Security Meeting notes from March 1976 indicate that the Syrians were seeking U.S. diplomatic intercession to ensure Israeli acquiescence to their planned invasion of Lebanon. When the US intermediaries contacted Israel, the Israeli government stated bluntly

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[119] Abraham, *The Lebanon War*, 52.

[120] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, President Sadat and Dr. Henry Kissinger. Monday, October 27, 1975 (12:00-12:50) the Oval Office.

[121] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Senator Jacob Javits and Max Friedersdorf.  Wednesday April 14, 1976 (4:30-5:00) the Oval Office, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

[122] Minutes of National Security Council Meeting on Lebanon.  Wednesday, April 7, 1976.  (2:35-4:00) the Cabinet Room, the White House.

that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) would respond if Syria invaded Lebanon with anything larger than a brigade of combat power.[123] Israel's final stipulation was that any Syrian forces must remain "north of the Beirut-Damascus road" to avoid Israel retaliation.[124]

Fearing annihilation and the loss of political control, the Christian led government and conservative forces were actively seeking Syrian military intervention to stabilize the situation. The Syrians who for decades had been supplying arms, supplies and training to the Muslims and PLO, now openly sided with the Christians and the conservative Lebanese government in the conflict. In a very contentious meeting with Yasser Arafat, President Assad told the PLO leader that he must renounce his support for Jumblatt and the reformist cause or he faced losing Syria's substantial protection and support.[125] The implications were clear to Arafat; the PLO faced losing support from its biggest benefactor and annihilation at the hands of the coming Syrian invasion. Arafat understood that his forces could not defeat the Syrians and that he risked losing his position as leader. The Syrian government was unwilling to let Lebanon fall to the radical Muslim factions or to let it emerge as a Palestinian dominated state that would invite the devastating continued military responses from Israel on their border or worse an Israeli occupation of the key terrain in vicinity of the Syrian heartland.[126]

The Syrian invasion of Lebanon on May 31st was spearheaded by the Third Armored Division.[127] The Syrian pretext for the invasion occurred when Muslim forces led by the fanatical

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[123] Minutes of National Security Council Meeting on Lebanon. Wednesday, April 7, 1976. (2:35-4:00) the Cabinet Room, the White House. Ironically as has been previously discussed, Syria already had over a Brigade's worth of soldiers operating in Lebanon by March 1976.

[124] Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon*, 195.

[125] Ibid., 194.

[126] Dupuy, Trevor, M. and Martell, Paul. *Flawed Victory, The Arab Israeli Conflict and the 1982 War in Lebanon.* Hero Books, Fairfax, 1986, 32.

[127] Reuvan, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon since 1975*, 22.

Major Maamari began a fierce bombardment of Christian villages near the Syrian border.[128] The Syrian political objective was to end the Lebanese Civil War once and for all and to stabilize the security situation so that presidential elections could be held. Although the U.S. had anticipated just such a Syrian intervention once the Christian position had become untenable, the actual scale of the Syrian invasion took the U.S. government by surprise. On June 2 1976, President Ford stated that the invasion appeared to be "limited" and described it as being a "helpful" development.[129] In actuality, by June 4th over 6,000 Syrian soldiers had stormed into Lebanon on three different axis of advance and these forces would eventually converge on Beirut with a total force strength approaching 13,000 by June 6th.[130]

The Syrians achieved most of their initial military objectives quickly with assistance from the nearly 3,000 special purpose forces and Al-Saiqa elements already operating in Lebanon.[131] Soon however the Syrian Army and its Christian allies encountered heavy resistance from the Lebanese Arab Army and other Palestinian based militias.[132] Facing mounting criticism from the greater Arab community about the Syrian unilateral action in support of Christians; Syria halted the offensive and began to negotiate with the reformist factions. Amid the calls for restraint and negotiations, the U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Francis Meloy and the U.S. Economic Advisor Robert Waring were captured and murdered by leftist militias on June 16th 1976, initiating the

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[128] Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon*, 195. The Maronite villages of Qobayat and Andaket were attacked by elements of the Lebanese Arab Army on 29 May 1976.

[129] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, King Juan Carlos of Spain and Dr. Henry Kissinger. Wednesday June 2, 1976. (11:05-11:58) the Oval Office. Dr Kissinger went on to say that the U.S. had no advanced warning of the invasion and the invasion appeared to be limited.

[130] Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle Ea*st, 59. A summit of Arab leaders was convened denouncing the Syrian action and Iraq even positioned troops on the Syrian border.

[131] Abraham, *The Lebanon War*, 55.

[132] Lawson, Fred H. "Syria's Intervention in the Lebanese Civil War: A Domestic Conflict Explanation." *International Organization Volume 38*, (1984), 452.

wide scale evacuation of U.S. personnel and civilians.[133] The killings occurred in Palestinian controlled territory and the PLO was quick to condemn the murders, however the incident demonstrated that the violence was far from over.

Seeking to end the violence in a favorable negotiating position before substantial Arab League peacekeeping forces could arrive; the Syrians and Christians renewed their offensive. Seizing upon the opportunity presented by the slow arrival of Arab League peacekeepers, the goal was to defeat the Palestinians and Muslim militias in order to force their opponents to the negotiating table in a disadvantageous position.[134] Seeking to increase their position at the inevitable bargaining table the Syrians advanced rapidly and by July 27th, they were in control of most of Lebanon. An official ceasefire between the Palestinians and the Syrians was implemented on July 29th which effectively ended the large scale fighting. The October Riyadh Conference brought an Official end to the Lebanese Civil War, but much like 1958, the Lebanese Crisis endured due to the fact that the underlying reasons for the violence remained unchanged.[135]


## The Aftermath and the Syrian Domination of Lebanon

The United States' passivity and ultimate decision against a military intervention in the 1975-1976 Lebanese Civil War was a shortsighted political expediency that resulted in needless deaths and long term misery for Lebanon. The U.S. missed an opportunity to support a stable western-style democratic country in a region dominated by authoritarianism. Worse, the Ford administration and its indecision effectively handed control of Lebanon's destiny to Syria. Syria would become the dominant power in Lebanese politics and society in general following the 1976

[133] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford and the Cabinet. Friday June 18 1976, (11:00 AM), the White House Cabinet Room.

[134] O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon 1975-1992*, 56.

[135] Reuvan, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon since 1975*, 26.

invasion. The human toll of the 1975-1976 conflict was immense with estimates of 40,000 dead, over 60,000 wounded and 600,000 Lebanese civilians displaced from their homes.[136] The Lebanese economy and tourist industry was utterly destroyed and nearly 600,000 Lebanese civilians had fled the country, creating a "brain drain" of immense proportion. The U.S. condoned Syrian invasion had disastrous political implications for the Lebanese people, and the violence was far from ended, reigniting regularly over the next 20 years. In describing the aftermath of the Syrian invasion, Henry Kissinger said,

> "The Christians were about to be wiped out and that would have given Lebanon to the radicals who would have squeezed the Syrians. A spectacular Syrian victory in March could have given them a need to prove their Arab nature and turn on the Christians; this would have radicalized Jordan and put pressure on the Saudis and isolated Egypt.[137]

President Ford described the Lebanese situation on 24 June as a "mess" and "so complex as to be unbelievable".[138] When asked by reporters how he saw the Lebanese situation playing out, President Ford stated simply, "one can only speculate but I would see Syria as the dominant element and the PLO as having only a minimum role in Lebanon".[139]

Amazingly, the Syrians were able to conduct a large scale invasion of a neighboring country with little to no serious political repercussions; and were able to do so without Israeli military interference. This astounding achievement was possibly chiefly because of the diplomatic and political maneuvering of the Ford administration. While the lack of regional escalation was admirable and in fact desirable to all parties, the fact is that the actions of the Ford

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[136] Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon*, 227.

[137] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford and the Cabinet. Friday June 18 1976, (11:00 AM), The White House Cabinet Room. Kissinger went on to say that "The end result should be a strategic situation which is favorable to us, because Syria and Egypt probably will get back together. We must remember that we are the only ones who are really in touch with all the parties and the only useful force working with all of them.

[138] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford and the Cabinet. Thursday June 24 1976, (11:00 AM), The White House Cabinet Room, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

[139] Ibid.

Administration effectively doomed the Lebanese people to decades of Syrian military occupation and political domination. The Syrians were able to achieve their objectives of coercing the PLO leadership and Islamic radicals, but with the ceasefire, the Syrians again reasserted their "Arabness" by allowing the terms of the 1969 Cairo Agreement to continue.[140] Far from being subjugated or weakened, the PLO signatories of the ceasefire even espoused their support to the Syrian government for their "support against the Zionists".[141]The Syrian invasion did not result in a weakening of the PLO as President Ford had originally envisioned the ceasefire agreement implemented by Syria, generally adhered to the original Cairo Accord and permitted PLO autonomy in southern Lebanon.[142]At least for the PLO, it was business as usual with one notable exception, the Lebanese Army and the Lebanese Government were no longer capable of or permitted to challenge their actions.

The ambiguity as to how to address the Lebanese Civil War was a product of U.S. indecisiveness and willingness at the highest levels to influence rather than lead. Due to poor articulation of goals and strategies, even seemingly straightforward U.S. actions were misinterpreted in the region. For example the July 19th evacuation of U.S. civilians from Beirut was misinterpreted by the Syrians as a message from the U.S. government. President Assad took the evacuation of the U.S. personnel as tacit approval to press the Syrian assault without the worry of U.S. civilian collateral casualties.[143] The Israelis seemed to have also been somewhat confused by the U.S. efforts following the evacuation. The Israeli Foreign Minister Allon

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[140] Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 114.

[141] Ibid., 116.

[142] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Max Fischer, Dr. Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft. Thursday July 2, 1976, (2:00 PM), the Oval Office, Gerald Ford Presidential Library. President Ford said that the PLO was being worn out by the Syrians.

[143]Ibid. Immediately following the evacuation of U.S. civilians President Assad had inquired of the President Ford if the evacuation operations were President Ford's way of sending him a message?

expressed amazement that the U.S. had contacted and coordinated with the PLO for the evacuation and then found it necessary to thank "the murderers of Ambassador Meloy".[144]

While the U.S. stressed to the Israeli leadership that the Syrian invasion was beneficial to all involved because it would stabilize Lebanon and reduce the power of the PLO, the U.S. was also opening back channel dialog with the high level PLO leaders. Israeli Foreign Minister Allon criticized the U.S. State Department for permitting PLO representatives to visit Washington. In order to assure the Israelis that the U.S. policy on dealing with the PLO had not changed and to mitigate any Israeli efforts to attack Syria or the PLO camps in Lebanon, Dr. Kissinger was forced to reassure the Israeli delegation that there was "no change in the United States' policy or attitude vis-a-vis the PLO". [145] According to the U.S. intelligence estimates, any attack into Lebanon by the Israelis in 1975-1976 whether against the Syrians, PLO, or Christians, would unite the fractious Arabs against the Israelis and further destabilize the entire region.[146] Unfortunately, the U.S belief that the Syrian invasion would be "helpful" or a "good thing" by weakening the PLO and stabilizing Lebanon was sorely mistaken.

The end of the fighting in 1976 was unfortunately just an interlude as fighting would again erupt in 1978 with the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in order to strike at the PLO camps. These camps and southern autonomous regions remained under Palestinian control in accordance with the Cairo Agreement and Syrian brokered ceasefire, and the PLO attacks into northern Israel finally provoked an Israeli military response. Wide scale fighting erupted, principally between former allies the Syrian Army and the Christian Lebanese Front forces. Appeals to the West from Christian leaders again went unanswered, but the Christians found a

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[144] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Max Fischer, Dr. Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft. Thursday July 2, 1976, (2:00 PM), the Oval Office, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Minutes of National Security Council Meeting on Lebanon. Wednesday, April 7, 1976. (2:35-4:00) the Cabinet Room, the White House, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

willing ally in Israel. When President Sarkis threatened to resign in protest to the killing of

thousands of Christians by Syrian forces, President Assad famously stated "let him, we can

always find another President".[147]

The Syrian occupation of Lebanon since 1976 has significantly impacted the personal and

political freedoms of Lebanese civilians. From 1976-1982, over 30,000 Syrian soldiers remained

in Lebanon as "invited peacekeepers" but their presence produced no significant assimilation of

Palestinians into Lebanese society, nor did it do anything to address the substantive divisive

issues confronting Lebanese society.[148] Under the Syrian occupation basic civil liberties are non-

existent with rampant claims of human rights abuses to include "illegal wire tapping, unlawful

detentions, incarcerations, arbitrary prison sentences, torture and disappearances".[149] The U.S.

State Department, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch all document scores of

substantiated Syrian abuses of Lebanese civil liberties. Ironically according to Daniel Pipes of the

Lebanon Study Group, "Damascus allows Lebanon's Christians a modest and largely rhetorical

margin of dissent, but Lebanon's Muslims by contrast enjoy no such luxury" with death often

being the cost of speaking out against the Syrian regime. This dichotomy is perhaps due to the

Syrian aversion to provoking Israel, who has shown a willingness to support the Lebanese

Christians against the Syrians in the past. President Assad's claim that Syria could simply get

"another president" has proven prescient throughout the years following the Lebanese Civil War.

To the Syrians, the Presidency was the uniting figure of Lebanon and their efforts throughout the

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[147] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Max Fischer, Dr. Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft. Thursday July 2, 1976, (2:00 PM), the Oval Office, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

[148] Hallenbeck, *Military Force as an Instrument of US Foreign Policy, Intervention in Lebanon August 1982- February 1984*, 13.

[149] Pipes, Daniel, "*Ending the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon, the US Role*". A report by the Lebanon Study Group. May 2000.

years have been geared towards picking a suitable man for the job. The Lebanese presidency since 1975 has always been a political ally and receptive to Syrian leadership.[150]

The window for a successful U.S. intervention to prevent the massive humanitarian crisis and wide scale violence in Lebanon closed with the Syrian invasion of 1976. The United States Government had been implored on multiple occasions by the Lebanese, Palestinians, Syrians, Israelis, Egyptians, The Vatican and the French to intervene in Lebanon. The Pope himself even informed President Ford on 3 June 1975 that Yasser Arafat and moderate Muslims in Lebanon were willing to recognize the existence of Israel if an end to the violence could be negotiated.[151] This startling concession alone should have spurred the Ford administration to action in Lebanon. Instead the United States Government spoke of negotiated settlements with no credible threat or serious discussion of a military intervention. All the while, the U.S. quietly encouraged, or at best turned a blind eye to the Syrian covert and overt military intervention.

The debate over whether or not to intervene militarily has to be weighed from many differing perspectives. Obviously, not all foreign policy decisions concern issues of vital national interests and leaders must weigh all options when deciding courses of action. However, intervention, if done astutely (as in 1958) can promote a peaceful settlement by facilitating the favorable conditions for conflict resolution. The intervention can tip the balance to the desired victor or it can simply establish a balance between the factions so that a negotiated settlement can be achieved. A strong military intervention can achieve balance so that both sides feel "safe" knowing that a resumption of hostilities can bring down the wrath of the intervener.[152] Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger and Secretary of State George Shultz famously debated this dilemma of whether and under what circumstances military force should be used to influence

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[150] Avi-Ran, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon since 1975*, 122.

[151] Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford, Pope Paul IV, Dr. Henry Kissinger, and Cardinal Cook. June 3, 1975. The Vatican City, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

[152] Walter, *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention*, 27.

regional conflicts. [153] While Weinberger insisted on a series of stringent policy tests before committing U.S. forces, Secretary Shultz came down solidly on the side of military strength or the real threat of a military force as a precursor to good diplomacy.

Admittedly the U.S. domestic concerns were paramount when confronted with the outbreak of violence in Lebanon. The U.S. economy was under severe strain and the country was still in shock from the Vietnam War. It can be and has been argued that the President could not afford politically to send troops to Lebanon in 1975 and that the levels of violence were acceptable as long as they didn't spill over, contaminate, or destabilize other vital spots in the region". [154] However, in the context of what was ultimately at stake, the approach taken by the Ford Administration was a dismal failure.

Ultimately the PLO was not weakened, Lebanon was not stabilized, the region's only functioning Arab democracy was occupied, thousands were killed and wounded, and the resulting "peace" lasted for less than one year. The precedent of 1958 had proven that a U.S. military intervention in Lebanon was possible with little loss of life especially with all of the warring factions and regional leaders inviting U.S. intervention. In hindsight, the U.S.'s step by step diplomacy efforts and its "benign neglect"[155] of the Lebanese situation did nothing to address the problems of Lebanon and in 1982 United States Marines would deploy to Lebanon amidst a vastly changed, convoluted and far more hostile operating environment.

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[153] Hallenbeck, *Military Force as an Instrument of US Foreign Policy, Intervention in Lebanon August 1982- February 1984*, XIV.

[154] Hanf, Theodore, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillian, 1994), 176.

[155] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 8.

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